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Public Relations Overview

- Public relations is the business of creating goodwill and understanding between animal control and the public
- The skills most important to an ACO relate to his or her ability to appropriately handle interactions with people
- Animal-handling skills are secondary

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Public Relations Overview

- As always, speak with your supervisor and department before engaging in any public relations activities
 - Understand your department's policies and procedures for handling the media
 - If your department does not have policies and procedures in place, MDAR can direct you to resources to help your municipality create these documents



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OFFICER COMMUNICATION, SAFETY & DE-ESCALATION

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First Impression

- Citizens form a first impression of you based on what they see
- Keep your appearance clean and neat
 - Have a uniform if at all possible
- Maintain your vehicle
 - Some ACOs have use of a municipal vehicle; others have personal vehicles
- Be aware of your body language

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Citizen Contact

- Keep 4 – 6 feet between you and the other person at all times
- Face the citizen during a conversation, but angle your body slightly to the side
- Make eye contact during the conversation, but do not stare

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Citizen Contact

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Look and stay calm no matter what the other person says or does

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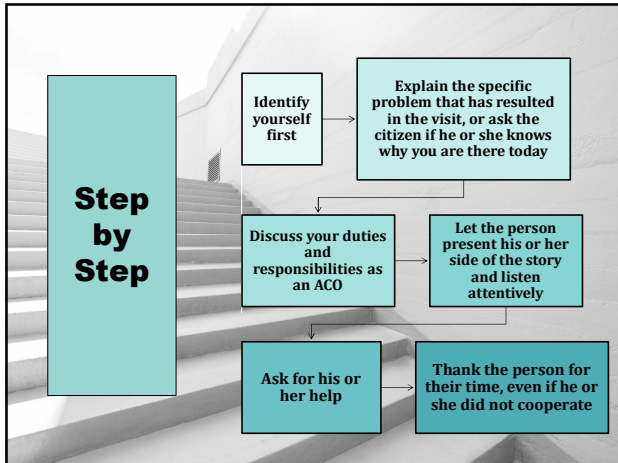
Keep your voice low and speak at a normal pace when talking to the other person

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Speak clearly and intelligently

- Know your job and the laws, but don't be afraid to say "I don't know"
- You may always call your supervisor, law enforcement, or MDAR if you have questions about your job or the law

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Verbal De-escalation

Verbal de-escalation is what we use during a potentially dangerous or threatening situation in an attempt to prevent a person from causing harm to us, themselves, or others

Without specialized training, you should never consider the use of physical force

Verbal de-escalation consists of tactics to help limit the number of staff who might be injured on the job

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Verbal De-escalation Tactics

- Some tactics include:
 - Simply listening
 - Distracting the other person
 - Refocusing the other person on something positive
 - Changing the subject
 - Motivating the other person
 - Empathizing with the other person
 - Giving choices
 - Setting limits

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De-escalating Effectively

- Understand communication barriers:
 - Pre-judging
 - Not listening
 - Criticizing
 - Name-calling
 - Engaging in power struggles
 - Ordering
 - Threatening
 - Minimizing
 - Arguing



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De-escalating Positively

- Use positive and helpful statements such as:
 - “I want to help you!”
 - “Please tell me more so I better understand how to help you.”
 - “Let’s call Mr. Smith; I know he’d be able to help you with this.”
 - “Ms. Jones handles this for our district, so let’s ask her what she thinks about this situation. She’s always willing to help!”



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Notification and Follow-up

Intervention must occur to end the situation, if it has not yet occurred. This may be accomplished by supervisors, security, or police, depending on the circumstances.

Always report minor situations

- Minor situations can be a cry for help and/or a warning sign of bigger things to come

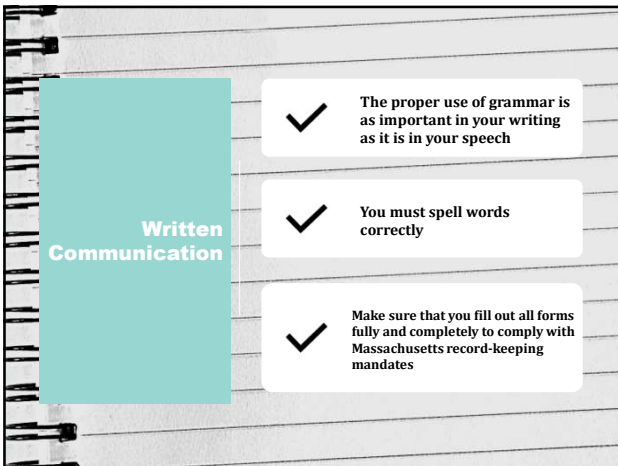
Always document every threatening event

- Documentation will help all parties when evaluating recurring events

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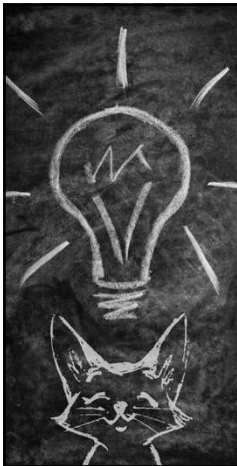


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MEDIA CONTACT

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Look at it as an Opportunity

- It is your chance to educate the public on the issue, whether it is animal cruelty, responsible pet ownership, or bite prevention
- It is also free and can be good publicity for your agency

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Be Available To the Press

- Do not return phone calls or release information unless you are authorized to do so or it goes through the proper channels (public relations officer, etc.)
- If you are authorized to do so, always return press phone calls, even if you cannot immediately answer their questions
- Do not be afraid to say "I don't know", but be sure to let them know you will get an answer to them as soon as possible



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Be Prepared



A reporter will usually have done some research before saying anything



Take time to prepare yourself; know the facts, expect questions, and consider what you want the interview to accomplish

Determine the reporter's purpose in writing the article

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Think Before You Speak

- Take a minute to think about your answer before saying anything.
- Do not feel obligated to comment if you are intercepted in the field, even if you are authorized to do so.

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"Off the Record" & Personal Views

- If there is something you do not want the general public to know, do not say it
- Do not use your municipality's social media platforms or your own social media platforms to share any details pertaining to your job
- Remain objective in all cases

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Get Your Supervisor's Approval

- If you decide to submit an article or news release from your agency, get your supervisor's approval first
- Consider your purpose, what needs to be said, and how to say it
- Do not submit something with your personal opinions in it
- If you mention another city, county, or state agency, be sure to call them first as a professional courtesy



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EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

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Educational Programming

- Most animal control problems are "people problems" which can be corrected and even prevented by educating your community on issues pertaining to pets
- Every officer-citizen contact is an educational opportunity
 - You have the chance to explain the law, answer questions, and teach responsible pet ownership



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Educate Groups

- In addition to individual citizens, you can educate groups:
 - Classrooms
 - Civic clubs
 - Church organizations
 - Kennel clubs
 - Other youth or adult groups



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Programming Opportunities

- Bite prevention
- Responsible pet ownership
- Laws and ordinances regarding animals
- Animal safety
- Rabies prevention
- Animal control services
- The importance of spay/neuter



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Proud to be part of the network that has helped over 14,000 local animals and counting!

FILE TAXES. HELP ANIMALS!
line 33F



WWW.MASS.GOV/ANIMALFUND

The Mass Animal Fund

You routinely have the ability to educate the public on the importance of sterilization by your participation in the Mass Animal Fund Spay/Neuter Voucher Program

- Low-income Massachusetts residents who receive state or federal services are eligible to receive vouchers for free spay/neuter of their dogs and/or cats

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A Day in the Life



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WRAP UP

Questions?

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